

22 September 1970

DCI BRIEFING FOR
23 SEPTEMBER NSC

SOVIET NAVAL ACTIVITY IN CUBA


I. Mr. President, the Soviets are developing a facility at Cienfuegos--on the south coast of Cuba--to support their naval operations in the Caribbean and the Atlantic. There is clear evidence of this in the port improvements and construction activity we have observed during the past month, and the work has proceeded to a point making it possible that Soviet naval units--including nuclear-powered submarines--may soon be operating regularly from Cienfuegos.

A.



1. Other port improvements include the installation of three anti-aircraft sites, and a communications antenna in the harbor area.

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2. New barracks and recreation facilities have been built, probably for Soviet submarine personnel, on Cayo Alcatraz, an island in the bay.
- B. Ships of a Soviet naval task force--the third to visit Cuban waters in the past 14 months--are still at Cienfuegos, and their activities provide further indications that the Soviets intend to make more permanent use of the port.
 1. One of the seven Soviet ships which reached Cienfuegos on September 9 and 10 was an Alligator-class amphibious landing ship, which brought and disembarked two 82-foot barges.
 2. 
 3. A Soviet cruiser and destroyer, both armed with guided missiles, left Cienfuegos on September 15, in company with a merchant tanker, but the other ships of the task force--the landing ship, the submarine tender, and two salvage ships--are still in the harbor.

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II. No Soviet submarines have been detected with this task force, but the first Soviet squadron to operate in Cuban waters in July, 1969, included a nuclear-powered N-class attack submarine and two F-class diesel units.

A. A second task force which visited Cienfuegos last May included an E-Two class nuclear cruise missile submarine and two more diesel types.

B. We have been receiving and checking out reports of Soviet submarines and submarine bases in Cuba--including underground submarine pens--since the Soviets first began moving into the island early in 1962, but none of these reports could be substantiated until that first task force visit in July of 1969.

C. During the 1962 missile crisis, we knew that several Soviet diesel submarines were headed for Cuba. We cannot judge whether the USSR actually intended to establish a submarine force in Cuba at that time,

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III. There has already been some review of the U.S.-Soviet negotiations during and after the 1962 crisis, to determine whether any of the understandings reached at that time would have a bearing on the latest developments.

A. There was, of course, no formal bilateral agreement putting an end to the crisis, because President Kennedy conditioned a no-invasion pledge on adequate inspection procedures to verify the removal of offensive weapons and guard against their re-introduction.

1. This, the Cubans and the Soviets never accepted.

B. The understanding between President Kennedy and Chairman Khrushchev made no reference to submarines.

1. The Soviets now would no doubt contend-- and correctly--that they made no undertakings except to remove the missiles and the bombers.

C. Unilaterally, however, the U.S. Government surrounded the settlement with statements which went much farther than this. The President's public statements and formal

communications at that time refer explicitly to the unacceptability of the presence in Cuba of any offensive weapons capable of striking targets in the United States, without distinction as to delivery systems or whether they are nuclear or conventional.

1. To cite a specific example, President Kennedy said in a press conference on September 13, 1962: "If Cuba should... become an offensive military base of significant capacity for the Soviet Union, then this country will do whatever must be done to protect its own security and that of its allies."
2. Secretary of State Dean Rusk told a press conference on April 23, 1963: "President Kennedy has made it utterly clear that we would not accept a re-introduction into Cuba of weapons which could strike at its neighbors, including the United States."

IV. The current Soviet naval activity in Cuba coincides with a general warming trend in Cuban-Soviet relations, and with recent statements by Fidel Castro

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to the effect that Cuba would welcome closer military ties with the Soviet Union.

- A. The Cienfuegos project probably was discussed when Soviet Defense Minister Grechko was in Cuba last November, and again when Raul Castro visited the Soviet Union in April of this year.
- V. The only full-fledged submarine base the Soviets ever established on foreign soil was the one in Albania in the late 1950's, before the Albanians split with Moscow.
 - A. The Soviet Navy has demonstrated in Alexandria, Egypt, however, that it can support submarine operations from friendly ports without establishing actual bases overseas.
 - 1. Soviet diesel submarines now operate in the Mediterranean on six-month patrols, thanks to a three-week stop in Alexandria midway in the deployment.
 - 2. The distinction between support facilities and an outright naval base is important to the Soviets because of their long-standing propaganda against so-called "imperialist and colonial exploitation" of overseas bases.

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B. It is possible that the Soviets intend to use Cienfuegos primarily as a harbor, making little use of shore facilities. With the ships they now have in position there, they can make minor repairs and provide limited service to submarines of any type.


1. The capabilities of the support ships-- together with the facilities now available at Cienfuegos--such as pier space, mooring buoys, fuel storage, barracks, and recreation-- can substantially extend the range and duration of Soviet submarines patrolling in the Atlantic and the Caribbean.

VI. To be specific, a Cuban support facility will save Soviet submarines about 2,500 miles of transit cruising to and from potential patrol areas off the east coast of the United States, compared to operations from the Northern Fleet bases near Murmansk.

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- B. Similarly, cruise missile and torpedo attack submarines could increase their time on-station by operating from Cienfuegos.
1. These submarines might also take advantage of the longer patrols to carry on surveillance and other intelligence operations along the U.S. east coast.
- C. The existence of a Cuban support facility would also give the Soviets the option--in the event of a crisis--of prepositioning submarines and their support ships outside the areas where American anti-submarine warfare coverage is most effective.
1. In this context, the Soviets have shown considerable interest in seaborne support of submarine operations in the equatorial waters of the Atlantic near Cape Verde.

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2. In preparation for such mid-ocean resupply and maintenance, the Soviets have acquired more than seven years of merchant marine experience in supporting their fishing fleets off Newfoundland from a base in Havana Bay.

3. It is also worth noting that Soviet submarines operating from Cienfuegos could patrol the Gulf of Mexico without having to enter through one of the narrow passages into the Caribbean from the Atlantic

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D. On the negative side, of course, Cienfuegos is relatively vulnerable to close surveillance by the United States, and equally vulnerable to attack in time of war.

VII. If the Soviets intend to develop Cienfuegos into a permanent base for the support of ballistic missile submarines--similar to our installations at Holy Loch and Rota--they will need additional facilities which are not there now.

A. A ballistic missile submarine requires repair shops and storage for nuclear weapons, as well as special missile loading equipment.

1. Certain repairs for ballistic missile submarines also require specialized missile support ships, or missile handling facilities ashore.
- B. As yet, we have detected no preparations at Cienfuegos for facilities such as these.

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